

Commitment to Marital Relationships — The Case of American Newlyweds

Ying-Ling Hsiao

Department of Social Work, Shih-Chien University
e-mail: ylhsiao@mail.usc.edu.tw

Abstract

Why do people feel committed and choose to remain in marriage? Using social exchange perspectives, we developed and tested a model that explains the processes and consequences of marital commitment. We used data from a sample of 278 newly married couples, drawn from the first wave of a three-year panel study during 1991-1993 conducted in the state of Washington. A structural equation model was used to evaluate a model that explains the impact of power/dependence on marital commitment and the effect of marital commitment on marital interaction. The findings reported here indicate that a high mutual dependence (average power) and an inequitable distribution of resources (lack of power advantage) promote people's feelings of cohesion and attachment, which, in turn, induce positive communication styles in solving disagreements. These findings suggest that the fewer valued resources a couple has access to and the more feelings of commitment they feel, the less likely that the couple would engage in a high level of marital conflict.

This study also identified sources for dependence by examining the various types of resources in marital couples'

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evaluation systems. The findings showed that newly-married couples placed more value on affection (e.g., liking), and interpersonal status characteristics and skills (e.g., understanding) than on socioeconomic resources. Since marriage in America has been viewed as a path for personal fulfillment and satisfaction, and as educational and occupational opportunities have increased for young women, newlyweds seem to value satisfaction derived from intimacy rather than socioeconomic resources.

Key Words: dependence, marital commitment, American newlyweds